



Australian Government
Refugee Review Tribunal

Country Advice China

China – CHN36020 – Dongshantang –
Gaolin –Fuqing – Fujian Underground–
Christian –Protestant – Evangelical–
Unregistered Church

27 January 2010

- 1 Please advise whether you are you able to find any country information that refers to a Dongshantang Church, a Chinese government church in Gaolin?**
- 2 If so, what is its location?**

A search of available resources has failed to confirm or deny that this church exists.

- 3 Please advise if there is any country information about people being arrested for attending a church in Gaolin in 2006?**

A search of available resources has failed to confirm or deny that these arrests took place.

CHRISTIANS IN THE PRC

A Christian in the PRC context denotes someone who adheres to Protestantism – which is one of the five recognized religions of the PRC – the others being Catholicism, Buddhism, Daoism and Islam – all are subject to monitoring by the state. Protestants whom the Chinese refer to as Christians, may adhere to the Methodist, Anglican, Baptist and Presbyterian faiths. According to Dr Kim-Kwong Chan, an Honorary Fellow at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, Protestantism in the PRC is a predominantly rural phenomenon. Both Dr Chan and Britt Towerey, who spent 43 years as a Baptist missionary in the region attribute crackdowns to actions by local cadres who are uninformed and bear a grudge against someone.¹

¹ CHINA: Protestants and Protestantism in China; treatment of Protestants; relations between the registered Three Patriotic Self Movement (TPSM) churches and unregistered churches; differences between Protestant forms of worship in China and elsewhere; differences in practice between the TPSM churches and house churches; beliefs, practices, holidays and ceremonies; update to CHN33002.EX of 8 October 1999 regarding Christians in Fujian province – Attachment 1)

The Australian of 24 December 2009 quotes Chinese government statistical figures for the registered church and an approximate figure for the non-registered church which is predominantly evangelical:

there are about 20 million in official Protestant churches and 10 million in the official Catholic Church.

But a far bigger movement, although more difficult to estimate its size, is the so-called "house" or family churches, which have proliferated outside official government control. Fan [a Christian academic Fan Yafeng who was sacked from his job at a government think tank, the China Academy of Social Sciences in November 2009] estimates that this loose network of independent churches has about 63 million members. About 70 per cent are evangelical.

"There are between 80 and 100 million Christians in China and this is growing by least 5 per cent each year," Fan says.(p2) ²

Recent attacks against house-churches

Since September 2009, there have been new efforts by the state to clamp down on house-churches including evangelical house-churches in China (however there is no specific reference to Fuqing in this report). The abovementioned article of *The Australian* of 24 December 2009 noted that the state made use of police and hired thugs (refer to Footnote 3) to attack Christians:

The latest trouble began in September when about 400 people attacked Christians attending the Golden Lamp, which had been built on the outskirts of the town of Lifan in central Shanxi province. About 70 church members were hospitalised. Later that month more than a dozen church leaders were arrested and paramilitary forces occupied the church, an eight-story edifice that had been constructed to serve a congregation of 50,000.

Their early Christmas present: in early December five pastors were sentenced to prison terms of up to seven years on charges including illegal assembly and five more were sentenced to two years in a labour camp.

There was another string of incidents in early November.

First, prominent Christian academic Fan Yafeng was sacked from his job at a government think tank, the China Academy of Social Sciences, then police blocked access to Shanghai's fast-growing Wangbang church. "This is the latest plan by the government to try to close house churches," Fan tells *The Australian*. (p1)

Another outspoken Beijing Christian and legal-aid worker, Zhang Dajun says: "While these incidents happen from time to time, this seems to be an extraordinary approach that is synchronised and orchestrated at a very high level

...

Says Zhang Yaojie, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of the Arts: "There has been no fundamental change in the attitude of government and it's still cautious of Christianity, especially towards house churches."(p2)

...

Many observers believe the government prefers the centralised Catholic model, rather than the looser networks and more anarchic style of evangelical house churches. That's why they are being singled out. (p5)."(refer to Footnote 2)

² Sainsbury, M. 2009, 'Persecuted in prayer', *The Australian*, 24 December – Attachment 2.

When house-churches attract large crowds and if they encourage missionary work they can also attract adverse attention from the state:

House churches have been around for decades, but their growth has accelerated in recent decades, producing larger and larger congregations that are far more conspicuous than the small groups of friends and neighbors that used to worship in private homes, giving the movement its name. (p 1)

...

While house churches have faced varying degrees of repression depending on the region and political climate, the latest crackdown appears to specifically target the largest congregations. (p2)

...

Adding to official concerns about their numbers, house-church Christians also emphasize missionary work - illegal in China - and some have even operated an underground network to help smuggle North Korean refugees and Uighurs out of China in defiance of the security forces. (p 2).³

CHRISTIANS IN FUJIAN PROVINCE

A newsletter from the Overseas Missionary Fellowship (a major Christian missionary agency which targets China) produced a report in April 2009 on the situation for house-churches in Fujian and made a positive assessment of the situation for both registered and unregistered house-churches:

In recent decades the church in Fujian has enjoyed rapid growth. Today there are conservatively 830,000 adult members in the churches managed by the TSPM/China Christian Council [**Researcher's note: Three-Self Patriotic Movement –Chinese government monitoring agency which controls registered churches**]. There are now more than 4,000 registered churches and meeting-points in the province. Churches account for 1,768 venues - the rest (over 2,200) are simpler "meeting-points." The statistics reveal an explosion of church growth, as back in 1993, only 15 years ago, there were "only" 950 churches and 1,000 meeting-points - so in that period the number of registered places of worship has doubled! ...

There are also large numbers of independent house churches in Fujian. The Fuzhou region saw the rise in the 1930s of the independent church movement known as the "Little Flock" associated with Watchman Nee (Ni Tuosheng). At the time, many educated young people and students broke away from the traditional denominational and missions churches to meet in what they believed was closer to the New Testament pattern. Today some in this movement hold their own meetings on TSPM church premises - others continue as unregistered house churches. The Little Flock churches are particularly strong in Fuqing County, where probably about half of the more than 100,000 believers belong to this grouping. In fact, Fujian seems to be home to a large number of independently-minded Christians. Apart from the Little Flock there are at least 80,000 members of the True Jesus Church in the province - this is another indigenous Chinese church which was founded nearly a century ago. In general, local government in Fujian seems fairly tolerant of unregistered believers as it is rare that one reads of cases of persecution of house-church Christians in this province. Whether registered or unregistered, the church in Fujian would appear to have a bright future as it "holds forth the Word of Life" and demonstrates the love of Christ actively in society.⁴

³ Bodeen, C. 2009, 'China works to halt Christian diffusion', *Charleston Gazette*, 11 December – Attachment 3.

⁴ The Protestant Church in Fujian Province' 2009, *Global Chinese Ministries* (newsletter), April, OMF (Overseas Missionary Fellowship) International website

http://www.omf.org/omf/us/resources_1/newsletters/global_chinese_ministries/gcm_newsletter_2009/global_c

China Aid (nonprofit Christian organization which reports especially on the unofficial church in the PRC) published its 'Annual Report on Persecution of Chinese House Churches by Province for 2006' in it there is a mention of one unregistered church destroyed in Pingtan (p13 of the report) – no other report was subsequently published. It makes the following observation on the lack of comprehensive reporting of incidents in the PRC and the difficulties it encountered:

CAA has compiled a set of statistics outlining, the number of arrests, the number of detentions (for over 10 days), and the number of imprisonments (for more than a year) that have been reported to them by reliable sources during 2006. Given the population the geographical size of China as well as the desire of Public Security Officials to keep such arrests hid from the outside world it would be impossible to measure the exact number that have occurred. As an example of this difficulty it should be noted that since these statistics were compiled an interview by an RFA reporter (<http://www.rfa.org/mandarin/shenrubao/2007/01/16/zongjiao/>) with a Christian lady detained named Liu Xiaoduo from 16th -17th January, has revealed that she came in contact with a group of more than 50 Christians during her detention. They had been arrested as a result of their Christmas celebrations on the 23rd and 24th December. The presence of these Christians may never have been known if it was not for this interview. These statistics should also be viewed in light of the fact that much of the Chinese House Church understandably remains hidden from the authorities. (p3).⁵

Further information on the situation of the Christian church in Fuqing is contained in Research Response of January 2009.⁶

Another Research Response which provides information on the manner underground Christians are treated by the authorities is attached for your information. It provides information on the more liberal manner in which religious policy is applied notwithstanding incidents of unfavourable treatment of some Protestant groups.⁷

[Chinese ministries apr 09/the protestant church in fujian province](#) - Accessed 2 November 2009 – Attachment 4.

⁵ China Aid Association 2007, *Annual Report on Persecution of Chinese House Churches by Province from January 2006 to December 2006*, January, p.13 http://chinaaid.org/pdf/2006_persecution_e.pdf – Accessed 9 December 2008 – Attachment 5.

⁶ RRT Research & Information 2009, *Research Response CHN34162*, 6 January 2009 – Attachment 6.

⁷ RRT Research & Information 2008, *Research Response CHN33597*, 29 July 2008 – Attachment 7.

List of Sources Consulted

Asia News <http://www.asianews.it/>
Zenit <http://www.zenit.org/index.php?l=english>
Christian Solidarity International <http://www.csi-int.org/>
Christian Science Monitor <http://www.csmonitor.com/>
China Aid <http://www.chinaaid.org/qry/page.taf>
Radio Free Asia www.rfa.org

Databases:

FACTIVA (news database)
BACIS (DIAC Country Information database)
REFINFO (IRBDC (Canada) Country Information database)
ISYS (RRT Country Research database, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, US Department of State Reports)
MRT-RRT Library Catalogue

Search Engines

Google search engine <http://www.google.com.au/>
Yahoo search engine <http://search.yahoo.com>
Copernic search engine

List of Attachments

1. CHINA: Protestants and Protestantism in China; treatment of Protestants; relations between the registered Three Patriotic Self Movement (TPSM) churches and unregistered churches; differences between Protestant forms of worship in China and elsewhere; differences in practice between the TPSM churches and house churches; beliefs, practices, holidays and ceremonies; update to CHN33002.EX of 8 October 1999 regarding Christians in Fujian province. (CISNET CHINA CX161343)
2. Sainbsury, M. 2009, 'Persecuted in prayer', *The Australian*, 24 December. (FACTIVA)
3. Bodeen, C. 2009, 'China works to halt Christian diffusion', *Charleston Gazette*, 11 December. (FACTIVA)
4. 'The Protestant Church in Fujian Province' 2009, *Global Chinese Ministries* (newsletter), April, OMF (Overseas Missionary Fellowship) International website
http://www.omf.org/omf/us/resources_1/newsletters/global_chinese_ministries/gcm_newsletter_2009/global_chinese_ministries_apr_09/the_protestant_church_in_fujian_province - Accessed 2 November 2009.
5. China Aid Association 2007, *Annual Report on Persecution of Chinese House Churches by Province from January 2006 to December 2006*, January
http://chinaaid.org/pdf/2006_persecution_e.pdf – Accessed 9 December 2008.
6. RRT Research & Information 2009, *Research Response CHN34162*, 6 January 2009.
7. RRT Research & Information 2008, *Research Response CHN33597*, 29 July 2008.